In Cold Blood by Truman Capote

On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. In Cold Blood is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence. (Amazon.com)

The story of the Clutter murders captivated Truman Capote, then a famous novelist and playwright, when he first read about them in 1959. He and his childhood friend, Harper Lee, made many trips to Kansas to research and write about the crime. They interviewed members of the Holcomb community, the FBI agents working on the case, and finally, the murderers. Capote reportedly took thousands of pages of notes and worked on the book for six years. He uses his novelist’s sense of storytelling, character, and style to weave three narratives (the impact on the town, the investigation of the murders, and the psychology of the murderers) into a seamless account of senseless violence in the American heartland.

In Cold Blood has long been regarded as a classic of nonfiction, and a forerunner of what Capote labeled the “nonfiction novel,” a book “conceived of journalism and born of a novelist” (Colquhoun). It is also regarded as a pioneer in the “true crime” genre.

Summer Reading
AP English Language & Composition: Grade 11

APLC students will read two books this summer. Along with every other student at HHS, you will choose a book from the summer reading list to read and discuss.

In addition, all APLC students will read In Cold Blood by Truman Capote.

You should also spend the summer keeping yourself up-to-date on current events, including politics, world events, arts, and culture. You should read newspapers, blogs, and current events websites. And you should have conversations about these things with your family, your friends, and other people you know.

The best predictor of success in APLC is “knowing stuff” and wanting to know more. The more you know about the world around you, the more knowledge you’ll have to draw on and apply to what we do in class.

This assignment was adapted from Melissa W. Noel’s article “A Cold Manipulation of Language.” English Journal, vol. 100, No. 4, 2011, pp. 50-54.
On the first day of class, you'll engage in a discussion of two contrasting passages you've chosen from *In Cold Blood*. As a model, consider these two contrasting passages, one from Capote's short story “A Christmas Memory” and the other from *In Cold Blood*:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>“A Christmas Memory”</th>
<th><em>In Cold Blood</em></th>
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<td>A woman with shorn white hair is standing at the kitchen window. She is wearing tennis shoes and a shapeless gray sweater over a summery calico dress. She is small and sprightly, like a bantam hen; but, due to a long youthful illness, her shoulders are pitifully hunched. Her face is remarkable—not unlike Lincoln's, craggy like that, and tinted by sun and wind; but it is delicate too, finely boned, and her eyes are sherry-colored and timid. “Oh my,” she exclaims, her breath smoking the windowpane, “it’s fruitcake weather!” (n.p.)</td>
<td>As an educated man successful in his profession, as an eminent Republican and church leader—even though of the Methodist church—Mr. Clutter was entitled to rank among the local patricians, but just as he had never joined the Garden City Country Club, he had never sought to associate with the reigning coterie. Quite the contrary, for their pleasures were not his; he had no use for card games, golf, cocktails, or buffet suppers served at ten—or, indeed, for any pastime that he felt did not &quot;accomplish something.&quot; (34)</td>
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Sample Analysis
The description of the woman in the first passage contains more adjectives and more figurative language (metaphor and simile) than the second passage. The voice is detached in the description of Mr. Clutter; it includes almost no details about his appearance, only about his reputation in the town. The voice is detached in the description of Mr. Clutter; it includes almost no details about his appearance, only about his reputation in the town. The voice is detached in the description of Mr. Clutter; it includes almost no details about his appearance, only about his reputation in the town. The voice is detached in the description of Mr. Clutter; it includes almost no details about his appearance, only about his reputation in the town. The voice is detached in the description of Mr. Clutter; it includes almost no details about his appearance, only about his reputation in the town.

Assignment
Your job is to find two contrasting passages in *In Cold Blood* and do an analysis similar to the one above. Be ready to talk about how they are different—in Capote’s word choice, in the details he includes, and where he uses devices like metaphors, parallelism, repetition, and imagery. Then, think about why he makes those choices, and what they convey about the author’s attitude toward his subject. Do not merely summarize the passages. You do not have to hand in a formal paper, but you should come to class with extensive notes.

You will share your passage and explain your analysis in a large-group discussion. You’ll also be expected to respond to others’ analysis to demonstrate your understanding of the entire text.

Your Analytical Toolbox
In AP Language and Composition, we look at how writers write, or the choices they make in the words, sentences, and overall structure of a text. As you read, you should pay attention to these five elements of writing:

**Mode**: An author will use several of the following forms in any book: description, narration, explanation, or argument. Think about which of these forms the author uses most often, and why.

**Style**: When looking at the author’s style, we look at word choice and sentence structure, also known as diction and syntax. An author might write seriously, playfully, sarcastically, or straightforwardly. Sentences might be long or short, meandering or terse. Language might be literal, or it might be full of metaphors.

**Devices**: Devices are the jewelry of writing: they create sparkles and interesting little gems of writer’s craftsmanship. Some devices you will already be familiar with include allusion, parallelism, repetition, analogies, metaphor, and hyperbole.

**Selection of detail**: Writers make conscious choices about what information to include, and when to include it. As, you read, ask yourself, why is the author telling me this, and why is he telling me now?

**Author’s lens**: When and where authors write, who they are, and what they believe all influence the writing choices they make. As you read, ask yourself, What do I already know about the author? What is the author telling me this, and why is he telling me now? What biases does he / she have? How might a different author have approached this topic differently? How do all of these things influence the choices the author makes?